



## What are they?

### Points To Remember About Shoulder Problems

- Most shoulder problems happen when the soft tissues in the shoulder break down.
- Shoulder problems vary widely and can include; dislocation, separation, rotator cuff disease, rotator cuff tear, frozen shoulder, fracture, and arthritis.
- The symptoms of your shoulder problems will depend on the specific type of problem you are having.
- Your doctor will recommend treatment depending on your type of shoulder problem.

Most shoulder problems happen when soft tissues in the joint and shoulder region break down.

## Who gets them?

Men, women, and children can have shoulder problems. They occur in people of all races and ethnic backgrounds.

## What are the types?

Shoulder problems vary widely. Doctors usually describe the problem by the type, for example:

- Dislocation, happens when the ball of your top arm bone pops out of your socket.
- Separation, happens when the ligaments between the collarbone and the shoulder blade area tear.
- Rotator cuff disease, such as tendinitis and bursitis, happens when tendons in the

shoulder inflame or become red, sore or swollen.

- Torn rotator cuff, a tear in the tendon in the rotator cuff.
- Frozen shoulder or adhesive capsulitis, happens when movement of the shoulder is restricted.
- Fracture, is a crack or break in a bone, usually in the collarbone or upper arm bone.
- Arthritis, can be one of two types:
  - Osteoarthritis, happens when over time the cartilage in the joint wears down and the bones rub together.
  - Rheumatoid arthritis is a disease that happens when your immune system causes inflammation in a joint.

## **What are the symptoms?**

The symptoms of your shoulder problems will depend on the specific type of problem you are having.

### **Dislocation**

The signs and symptoms of dislocation in the shoulder include:

- Pain.
- Swelling.
- Numbness.
- Weakness.
- Bruising.
- The arm appears out of position.

### **Separation**

The signs and symptoms of shoulder separation include:

- Pain and tenderness.
- A bump in the middle of the top of the shoulder.

### **Rotator Cuff Disease**

The signs and symptoms of rotator cuff disease may be due to tendinitis or bursitis and may include a slow onset of pain:

- In the upper part of your arm.
- When trying to sleep on your shoulder.
- That travels down your arm.
- That worsens when you lift your arm away from the body or over your head.

### **Torn Rotator Cuff**

The signs and symptoms of a torn rotator cuff include:

- Pain in the muscle in the top of the arm and the outer shoulder.
- Increased pain when lifting the arm or extending it out and lowering the arm back down.
- Weakness.
- A popping or clicking noise when moving the shoulder.

## **Frozen Shoulder**

The signs and symptoms of a frozen shoulder include:

- Stiffness in the joint.
- Tightness.
- Unable to lift the arm.

## **Fracture**

The signs and symptoms of a fracture include:

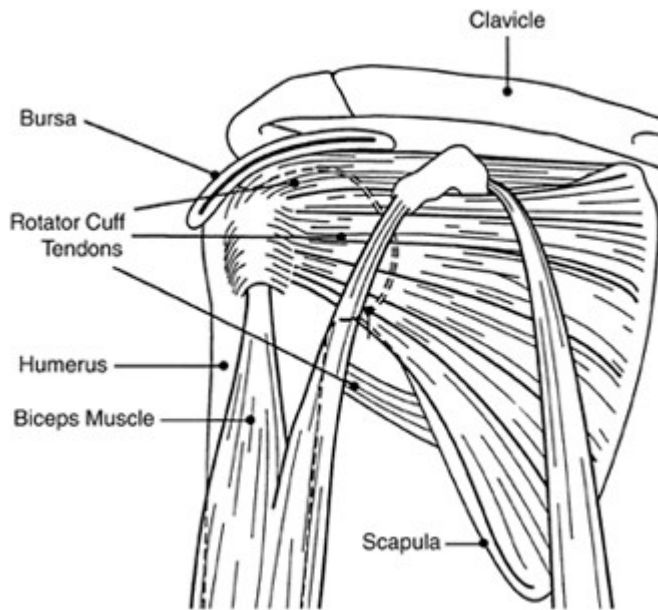
- Severe pain.
- Redness.
- Bruising.
- The bones may appear out of position.

## **Arthritis**

The signs and symptoms of arthritis of the shoulder include:

- Pain.
- Decrease in shoulder motion.

## **What causes them?**



Most shoulder problems happen when the soft

tissues in the shoulder breakdown. This can happen when you:

- Repeating the same motion with your shoulder.
- Aging.
- Using the shoulder too much, especially if you are older.
- Performing manual labor.
- Injuring the shoulder, sometimes from playing sports or falling.

## Is there a test?

Doctors diagnose shoulder problems by:

- Asking about your medical history.
- Performing a physical exam.
- Ordering tests, such as:
  - X-rays.
  - Ultrasound.
  - Magnetic resonance imaging or MRI.

## How are they treated?

### Dislocation

Treatment for a shoulder dislocation may also include:

- Your doctor placing the ball of your upper arm back into the socket.
- Wearing a sling or device to keep your shoulder in place.

- Exercises to improve
  - Range of motion.
  - Strengthen muscles.
  - Prevent injuries.
- Surgery if you injure the tissues or nerves around the shoulder.

## **Separation**

Treatment for a shoulder separation may also include:

- A sling to keep your shoulder in place.
- Exercise, after a time of rest.
- Surgery if the tear is severe.

## **Rotator Cuff Disease**

Treatment for tendinitis and bursitis includes:

- Medicines such as aspirin and ibuprofen to help lower your pain and swelling
- Ultrasound to warm deep tissues and improve blood flow to the area of your injury.
- Injection of a corticosteroid drug if your shoulder is not getting better.
- Surgery if after 6 to 12 months your shoulder is not better.

## **Rotator Cuff Tear**

Treatment for a rotator cuff tear may also include:

- Heat or cold to the sore area of your injury.
- Medicines to help your pain and swelling.
- Electrical stimulation of your muscles and nerves.
- Ultrasound to warm deep tissues and improve blood flow to the area of your injury.
- Injection of a cortisone medicine into your shoulder joint.
- Surgery to repair the tear if you don't see improvement with other treatments.

## **Frozen Shoulder**

Treatment for a frozen shoulder may also include:

- Medicines to help with pain and swelling.
- Heat to the sore area.
- Stretching exercises.
- Nerve and muscle stimulation using a transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS).
- Injection of a corticosteroid drug if your shoulder is not better.
- Surgery if the shoulder does not improve with other treatments.

## **Fracture**

Treatment for a fracture may include:

- A doctor putting the bones into a position to promote healing.
- A sling or other device to keep the bones in place.
- After the bone heals, exercise to strengthen the shoulder and restore movement.
- Surgery.

## Arthritis

Treatment for arthritis may include:

- Medicines to help with pain and swelling.
- Physical therapy.

If you injure a shoulder, try the following:

- **Rest.** Don't use your shoulder for 48 hours
- **Ice.** Put an ice pack on your injured shoulder for 20 minutes, four to eight times per day.  
You can use a:
  - Cold pack.
  - Ice bag.
  - Plastic bag filled with crushed ice wrapped in a towel.
- **Compression.** Put even pressure or compression on the painful area to help reduce the swelling to your shoulder. A wrap or bandage will help hold your shoulder in place.
- **Elevation.** If you are able, keep the injured area above the level of your heart. Using a pillow under your shoulder will help.

## For More Info

### U.S. Food and Drug Administration

Toll free: 888-INFO-FDA (888-463-6332)

Website: <https://www.fda.gov>

[Drugs@FDA](https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cder/daf) at <https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cder/daf> [Drugs@FDA](https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cder/daf) is a searchable catalog of FDA-approved drug products.

### Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics

Website: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs>

### American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons

Website: <https://www.aaos.org>

### American College of Rheumatology

Website: <https://www.rheumatology.org>

### American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine

Website: <https://www.sportsmed.org>

### American Physical Therapy Association

Website: <https://www.apta.org>

### **American Shoulder and Elbow Surgeons**

Website: <https://www.ases-assn.org>

### **Arthritis Foundation**

Website: <https://www.arthritis.org>

If you need more information about available resources in your language or other languages, please visit our webpages below or contact the NIAMS Information Clearinghouse at [NIAMSInfo@mail.nih.gov](mailto:NIAMSInfo@mail.nih.gov).

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